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ABSTRACT

In 1992, school leaders and teachers at Wallace-Rose High School in Teachey, North Carolina, began a multi-year whole-school improvement initiative that included the following actions: (1) identify low-performing students; (2) develop a team of faculty and administrators to work with low-performing students; (3) reduce class size for low-performing students; (4) provide extra help by extending the school day; and (5) combine school and community resources to focus on helping students succeed. Wallace-Rose adopted the following strategies for improvement: (1) require all students to complete a challenging academic core and a major; (2) raise expectations in the school and classroom; (3) provide organization, time, and staff development to support student improvement; (4) teach in ways that motivate students to learn challenging content; (5) upgrade the vocational program; (6) develop a guidance and advisement system; (7) organize work-based learning for students; and (8) use data to guide school practices. The improvement initiative has resulted in improvements in overall student performance, especially by African-American students. Despite enrolling more students in tougher courses, Wallace-Rose made a number of gains in

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1994-1996, including fewer dropouts, student suspensions, and discipline problems. Wallace-Rose's success illustrated the importance of principals assuming the roles of visionary, role model, instructional leader, and manager of school improvement. (MN)

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Case Study

WALLACE-ROSE HILL HIGH SCHOOL
Teachey, N.C.

Wallace-Rose Hill High School is located among the pines, sandy fields and small agricultural towns of Duplin County on North Carolina's coastal plain. The county is the largest producer of poultry and swine in the state. The textile industry has been prominent in the past, but the community received a shock when a local plant closed, leaving 1,200 people unemployed.

The high school enrolls 620 students in grades 9 through 12. Although Duplin County is the next to largest county in the state, it ranks 114 of 115 school districts in North Carolina in per-pupil spending. Most students come from families in the low to middle socioeconomic range. Thirty-nine percent of students are currently receiving free or reduced-price lunches. Approximately 55 percent of students are minorities: 52 percent are African-American and three percent are Hispanic.

Given its economic situation, Wallace-Rose Hill High School stands out as one of the Southern Regional Education Board's *High Schools That Work* sites that made the most improvement in reading and mathematics between 1994 and 1996. The belief that all students can meet high expectations compensates for the school's lack of funds and equipment.

School Leaders and Teachers Are Committed to Improving Achievement

Wallace-Rose Hill High School undertook improvement efforts because of a guiding philosophy that impels school leaders and teachers to do whatever is necessary to elevate student performance. Principal Charles Blanchard says improvement is a way of life at the school.

In 1992, school leaders and teachers studied research on whole-school improvement and decided to take five actions:

- Identify low-performing students;
- Develop a team of faculty and administrators to work with these students;
- Reduce class size for these students;
- Provide extra help by extending the school day;
- Combine school and community resources to focus on helping students succeed.

When school leaders learned about *High Schools That Work*, they realized they had "found the glue to meld these efforts together."

Strategies for Improvement

Leaders and teachers at Wallace-Rose Hill adopted eight major strategies for improving the school:

- **Require All Students to Complete a Challenging Academic Core and a Major**

Wallace-Rose Hill High School has raised graduation requirements from 20 (required by the state) to 27 and will soon raise them to 28. Over a 10-year period beginning with the 1988-89 school year, the school made the following changes in its required academic core:

1988-89 Academic Core	1998-99 Academic Core
■ Four units of English	■ Four units of college preparatory-level English
■ Two units of mathematics	■ Three units of mathematics, including Algebra I
■ Two units of science, including biology	■ Three units of science, including Physical Science and biology
■ Two units of social studies, including U.S. History, and Government and Economics	■ Three units of social studies—one in World Studies, one in U.S. History, and one in Government and Economics
	■ One unit in keyboarding in the ninth grade

The school replaced all low-level English, science and social studies courses with college preparatory-level courses and replaced General and Consumer Mathematics with Technical Mathematics I and II and Algebra I.

All students are asked to complete either an academic or a vocational/technical major. They identify a concentration in the ninth grade, but may revisit the decision throughout high school. The vocational/technical major involves three or four credits in Agriculture, Business and Marketing, Allied Health Occupations, Drafting, Auto Technology, or Food Science.

School leaders and teachers encourage students to go beyond the required academic core and to take college courses in English, mathematics and science. In 1995-96 the school arranged with James Sprunt Community College to offer English, mathematics, history and religion to high school students. During the 1997-98 school year, 40 Wallace-Rose Hill students received college credit.

- **Raise Expectations in the School and in the Classroom**

One event raised expectations at Wallace-Rose Hill High School perhaps more than any other. During the spring of 1994-95, school and district leaders in Duplin County acknowledged that many students were entering the ninth grade unprepared to do high school-level work in mathematics and English. "We had to address that problem," said Superintendent Leonard Guy.

The district and the school worked together to establish a policy, starting in 1995-96, that prohibits students from entering the ninth grade if they cannot demonstrate that they are ready to take English 9 and Algebra I. Students who needed help were identified by their scores on the state end-of-course tests in English and mathematics. Duplin's leaders realized that a tough policy would not work unless they created a "safety net" for unprepared students. As a result, they developed an intensive six-week summer catch-up program.

Parents in many communities would have balked at such a plan, but Duplin's leaders were a step ahead. The leaders conducted a meeting of parents, school board members and business leaders to explain the need for holding students to higher standards. They described the problem and the plan for solving it. Most parents understood the problem and agreed with the policy. "Parents got busy to make sure their children were ready for high school," Superintendent Guy said. "When school started the next year, there was a ripple effect in all grades, because everyone understood that all students had to meet the standards." Because of this effort, students at all grade levels know that performance counts at Wallace-Rose Hill High School.

Students who have difficulty meeting standards in their courses have the option of going to afternoon learning centers at the school to receive extra help, usually in the form of re-teaching and re-testing. All teachers assist students after school on Mondays and Tuesdays; many of them remain after school on the other three days as well. A peer tutoring program operates during the school day. Students entering grades 9 and 11 who do not perform satisfactorily on end-of-course exams in English and mathematics are required by a new state policy to participate in six weeks of extra help in the summer.

Blanchard believes meaningful homework is important in helping students learn challenging content. Students are expected to do homework and know they will receive a grade on it. As a result, the percentage of Wallace-Rose Hill students who reported doing one hour or more of homework each day increased from 58 percent in 1994 to 74 percent in 1996. The percentage at all *HSTW* sites was 42 percent in 1996.

School leaders send the message to students and the community that high academic performance pays off. Students who excel in their studies receive special cards entitling them to privileges at school and in the community.

Leaders and teachers believe that getting students to complete a challenging program of study is important. Therefore, only students participating in planned and structured internship programs in their vocational concentrations are allowed to leave school early to go to work.

- **Provide Organization, Time and Staff Development to Support Student Improvement**

In 1995-96 school leaders changed the school schedule from seven 50-minute periods to four 90-minute periods per day. The intent was to give teachers 1) more time in the classroom to get students to complete real-world projects and solve authentic problems and 2) longer planning periods that would enable teachers to observe each other and to work together to develop joint assignments. With the block schedule, teachers have three classes and one planning period per day.

During the 1995-96 and 1996-97 school years, teachers were released early for half a day each month for staff development. Teachers, counselors and school administrators also attend state and national conferences on school improvement. Teachers have received staff development in applied learning, integrated academic and vocational studies, reading to learn, writing across the curriculum, cooperative learning, and using *HSTW* assessment data to guide school change. County leaders organized "Walk in My World," a job-shadowing program that allows teachers to spend three days in the summer in a business or industry to learn the skills and education needed in the workplace. Staff development has not been easy; the school had no staff development funds until 1994. The practice has been to send small groups to participate in staff development and let them train the rest of the staff.

- **Teach in Ways That Motivate Students to Learn Challenging Content**

The process of integrating academic and vocational studies had a humble beginning at Wallace-Rose Hill High School, since many teachers were tentative about the concept. Administrators initially encouraged teachers to visit each others' classes to get an idea of what other staff members were teaching. By doing so, teachers were able to see commonalities in content and techniques. Observations also helped put some teachers at ease with "those other guys." Teachers began to agree that they needed common planning time to review each others' objectives and to develop joint assignments. In 1995-96 each teacher agreed to complete at least two integrated activities during the school year. Completion of these activities was reflected in teachers' professional development plans and evaluations. A list of integrated learning activities, which is updated regularly, was posted in the school workroom for all teachers to review.

In 1996-97 the school introduced a senior project as a graduation requirement. The effort has been a huge success in terms of the quality of students' work and involvement of community members as mentors and "coaches."

The senior project at Wallace-Rose Hill involves students in developing projects through their English classes. The principal gives an orientation on the project to all 11th-graders. He explains that the project is a graduation requirement, outlines what students must do to complete it, and assigns them the task of researching a topic. During the first week of senior year, students submit topics to the school improvement team. The team reviews the ideas and provides feedback to the students. Each student must have at least two mentors or coaches for the project—a school representative and a community representative. To complete a project, students do research, build a product or provide a service, write a research paper on what they did, and give a demonstration.

Students indicate that project learning is beneficial. One student said, "I know this assignment is tough, but my project is on a topic I chose. I don't mind working hard on it." One student researched U.S. Civil War battles and developed a series of history lessons to present to fifth-graders. He videotaped himself teaching the lessons.

■ **Upgrade the Vocational Program**

Wallace-Rose Hill High School began the process of upgrading its vocational program by offering new courses and revising several existing programs. Because of its proximity to the North Carolina beaches, the school started a hospitality and tourism option as part of the marketing program in 1996-97. It was also one of the first schools in the state to develop a swine and poultry course. Students take the course as the culminating course in an agricultural major and go to the nearby community college to take courses in the business management aspects of the program.

In 1997-98 Wallace-Rose Hill High School added a computer-repair course. Students learn about computer hardware, how to build a computer, and how to trouble-shoot hardware and software problems. They also build computers on their own. As a consequence of this class, several students plan to take physics and additional mathematics courses needed for careers in the computer industry.

Wallace-Rose Hill High School receives few funds to upgrade equipment and technology. The county has provided some support for the computer lab and for equipment to help students create visual presentations for their oral reports. The bank donated a laser printer and the local poultry company gave furniture for the lab.

The business education teacher gets her students to make full use of new equipment and materials. Students learn to use MicroSoft Office software programs—MS Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint. They prepare essays and oral reports and develop presentations. The teacher said, "Just using the technology is not enough; students must perform competently and quickly." Students are enthusiastic about their assignments and most of them say the class is their favorite. One student said, "We learn difficult things. We write a lot and learn a lot of mathematics. This class is never boring."

■ **Develop a Guidance and Advisement System**

The heart of Wallace-Rose Hill's effort to get more students to complete challenging courses is a strong system of academic and career guidance and advisement that includes a teacher-adviser program and open-house events in the evenings. During a 30-minute period once a week, teacher-advisers help students complete four-year plans, pre-register for challenging courses, and focus on career goals. Each teacher remains with the same group of 16 to 20 students throughout high school.

Counselors and teachers developed a booklet to help students learn more about career majors they can pursue at Wallace-Rose Hill, the course requirements for each major, and the requirements for continuing their studies at the postsecondary level.

To engage parents in the guidance process, the school initiated Ninth Grade Night. Parents of incoming ninth-graders are invited to meet with their children and a teacher-adviser, review and sign a four-year plan, and approve their children's course selections for the coming year. The event routinely draws 95 percent of parents.

The popularity of Ninth Grade Night led to Rising Senior Night, an event to help 11th-graders and their parents review and update four-year plans in preparation for the senior year. An open house for 10th-graders and their parents is being added during the 1998-99 school year. Teacher-advisers phone students' parents before open-house events, report card distributions and other special occasions.

Guidance counselors provide staff development and resource materials for the program. At the beginning of each school year, counselors update the staff and train new teacher-advisers. The advisers keep copies of students' four-year plans and other pertinent information in a notebook in the classroom so they can answer questions on the spot. They also keep information on promotion and graduation policies and minimum admission requirements for colleges and universities.

Before entering high school, students participate in a six-week career exploration class. They learn about a variety of careers, take a career interest assessment, and begin to think about where they might want to focus in high school.

These efforts are paying off. Approximately 80 percent of Wallace-Rose Hill students enter either a two-year or a four-year postsecondary institution after graduation. By the end of the 1997-98 school year, only three students did not have definite plans for work or further learning.

- **Organize Work-Based Learning for Students**

All students completing a vocational/technical program are strongly encouraged to participate in an internship during the senior year. Allied health students rotate through all departments of facilities such as the local hospital, the nursing home, an optometrist's office and a dentist's office. Students in the agriculture program intern at a local farm. Students apply for the internships and are expected to keep journals of their work experiences. They connect work experiences with career and academic studies in the classroom and receive a grade based on classroom work and employer evaluations.

- **Use Data to Guide School Practices**

The principal at Wallace-Rose Hill places a high value on collecting and using data on students' academic performance and how school and classroom practices are connected to performance. He shares findings from the *HSTW* Assessment (including the student assessment, the teacher survey and the student follow-up study), the results of the North Carolina end-of-course exams, and other data with the school improvement team. The entire faculty reviews the data and discusses the information as a group and in committees. After determining the major implications, the faculty uses the information to update the school improvement plan and to adjust courses and assignments.

School leaders and teachers appreciate the role of data in planning next steps. In conducting the *HSTW* follow-up study of youths who participated as seniors in the 1996 *HSTW* Assessment, the school succeeded in getting all 58 graduates to return their survey sheets. "We needed to find out what had happened to our students since they graduated," one teacher said.

Teachers and leaders at Wallace-Rose Hill High School "stay on top of" what is working and what is not working in getting high performance from their students. Near the end of each school year, the school improvement team uses the *HSTW* annual progress-report process to reflect on the school's accomplishments during the past year. Team members review data collected throughout the year to identify challenges and to set goals for addressing them in the coming year. "This process helps us determine what we need to do next," said Mary Jo Robinson, guidance counselor and *HSTW* site coordinator.

Duplin County, N.C., Works Hard to "Grow" and Develop its Teachers

Education leaders in Duplin County, N.C., see benefits in having teachers who grew up in the community. The principal, the guidance counselor and most teachers at Wallace-Rose Hill High School graduated there. The superintendent and most teachers also grew up in Duplin County. As a consequence, school leaders and staff know students, parents and community leaders very well. Teachers who know students' parents often get better results.

Duplin County encourages local young people to become teachers by providing scholarships to help them pursue a degree in education at a postsecondary institution. The scholarships may be used at James Sprunt Community College and the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW).

To help new teachers realize their full potential, Duplin County leaders developed a strong support program that is unique in the state. It involves intensive staff development, including specialized workshops before and during the school year, frequent "support group" meetings to help new teachers identify their strengths and problem areas, regularly-scheduled mini-workshops, and a summer professional academy. One or more teachers are assigned to "mentor" each new teacher in the first four years. Mentors observe the novices and make suggestions for improvement. To carry out the training program, district leaders work with experts at the local community college and the School of Education at UNCW.

Progress in Getting High Performance from All Students

Wallace-Rose Hill High School leaders believe high standards pay off, and they can prove it.

■ Overall Performance Has Improved

In 1997 Wallace-Rose Hill High School received "exemplary status" in North Carolina's pilot accountability program for measuring school achievement. This recognition was based on the fact that the school met and exceeded state goals on five mandated end-of-course exams. As a result, each certified faculty member received a $1,000 bonus. The school has also demonstrated consistent improvement in average scores on end-of-course exams, the *HSTW* Assessment, and the SAT.

The school's average scores on the *HSTW* Assessment improved significantly in reading and mathematics between 1994 and 1996. (See Table 1.) The 1996 average score was significantly higher than the average score for students at all *HSTW* sites in reading, mathematics and science, and met or exceeded the *HSTW* goals in all three areas.

Table 1

Comparison of Wallace-Rose Hill High School's Average Scores with Previous Scores and Average Scores of Other Groups

	Wallace-Rose Hill		All Sites	National Vocational	National Academic	SREB Goal
	1994	1996	1996			
Reading	271*	297*	273	267	302	279
Mathematics	286*	305*	285	277	317	295
Science	288	292	283	267	307	292

Notes: Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 500.

* These scores were significantly different between 1994 and 1996.

Wallace-Rose Hill students showed consistent improvement between 1990 and 1998 on North Carolina's end-of-course exams in Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, Chemistry, Physics, Biology, Physical Science, U.S. History and Government. This occurred while the school was increasing the percentages of students completing higher-level mathematics and science courses. (See selected scores in Table 2.)

Table 2

Progress of Wallace-Rose Hill High School Students on North Carolina's End-of-Course Exams Between 1990 and 1998

	English I	Algebra I	Geometry	Algebra II	Chemistry	Physics	Biology
1990	66	42	34	34	39	44	40
1998	53	52	54	57	57	57	54

Note: All students completing each course were required to take the end-of-course test for that course. The scale of scores varies from course to course, but ranges from about 22 to about 87.

Between 1993 and 1997, the average SAT score for students at Wallace-Rose Hill High School improved from 772 to 881, while the percentage of students taking the SAT increased.

■ **African-American Students Achieved at a High Level in Reading and Mathematics**

African-American students, who make up half of the student population at Wallace-Rose Hill High School, performed better on the *HSTW* Assessment in reading and mathematics than did similar students at other *HSTW* sites. These students' reading and mathematics scores also improved between 1994 and 1996. (See Table 3.)

Table 3

Comparison of Wallace-Rose Hill High School's Average *HSTW* Reading and Mathematics Scores with Previous Scores and Average Scores of African-American Students

	Wallace-Rose Hill 1994	Wallace-Rose Hill 1996	National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) National Sample	All *HSTW* Sites	SREB Goal*
Reading	265	287	283	264	279
Mathematics	281	294	288	269	295

Note: Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 500.

* Meeting the reading goal means that students have demonstrated an overall understanding and interpretation of what they read. They can make connections between what they read and their personal experiences and draw conclusions. They are able to use information to perform tasks and follow directions. Meeting the mathematics goal means that students can apply their understanding of mathematical operations and notation to interpret expressions and solve a variety of problems, including some multi-step problems in algebra and geometry. They are able to read and use instruments, interpret data from a variety of graphs, and find the probability of a simple event.

■ **More Students Are Taking "the Right Courses"**

The improvement in mathematics performance at Wallace-Rose Hill High School may be due to a decline in the percentage of students taking lower-level mathematics courses and an increase in the percentage of students taking higher-level mathematics courses. (See Table 4.)

Table 4

Comparison of Mathematics Course-Taking Patterns and Average Scores
at Wallace-Rose Hill High School Between 1994 and 1996

Students completed:	1994		1996	
	%	Average Mathematics Score	%	Average Mathematics Score
Basic Algebra I	57	279	36	287
College-Preparatory Algebra I	37	299	53	309
Algebra II	42	308	91	308
Geometry	61	301	96	306
Trigonometry or Algebra III	15	320	25	310
Advanced Mathematics	7	325	22	337

Note: Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 500.

Increasingly large percentages of students at Wallace-Rose Hill are completing college-preparatory physical science, college-preparatory biology, and chemistry. The percentage of students completing college-preparatory biology rose dramatically between 1994 and 1996, and the average science score of these students met the *HSTW* goal of 292. (See Table 5.) Eighty-four percent of students at the school completed college-preparatory biology in 1996, compared to 25 percent at all *HSTW* sites and 56 percent at high-scoring sites with students similar to those at Wallace-Rose Hill High School.

Table 5

Comparison of Science Course-Taking Patterns with Average Scores
at Wallace-Rose Hill High School Between 1994 and 1996

Students completed:	1994		1996	
	%	Average Science Score	%	Average Science Score
General Physical Science	39	283	16	285
College-Preparatory Physical Science	12	291	84	292
General Biology	21	299	19	283
College-Preparatory Biology	21	299	84	292
Chemistry	41	296	65	295
Physics	12	292	12	313

Note: Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 500.

The average score of Wallace-Rose Hill students on the *HSTW* reading test far surpassed the *HSTW* reading goal of 279 in 1996. Students taking any English courses at the school had average reading scores that exceeded the average scores of students at all *HSTW* sites. (See Table 6.)

Table 6

Comparison of the English Course-Taking Patterns and Average Scores at Wallace-Rose Hill and at All *HSTW* Sites in 1996

Students completed:	Wallace-Rose Hill		All *HSTW* Sites	
	%	Average Reading Score	%	Average Reading Score
General English 9	5	287	61	270
College-Preparatory English 9	95	298	31	284
General English 10	6	287	61	270
College-Preparatory English 10	95	298	32	284
General English 11	7	293	57	270
College-Preparatory English 11	93	297	30	284
General English 12	5	287	52	271
College-Preparatory English 12	91	298	26	285

Note: Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 500.

More students at Wallace-Rose Hill High School than at high-scoring *HSTW* sites completed the challenging *HSTW*-recommended curriculum in English and mathematics. (See Table 7.)

Table 7

Comparison of the Percentages of Students Meeting the *HSTW* Curriculum Goals in English and Mathematics at Wallace-Rose Hill High School and at Similar High-Scoring Sites in 1996

Completed the *HSTW* Curriculum in:	Wallace-Rose Hill High School		High-Scoring Sites Similar to Wallace-Rose Hill	
	%	Average Score	%	Average Score
English	97	297 in reading	53	293 in reading
Mathematics	95	306 in mathematics	84	308 in mathematics

Note: Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 500.

Forty-four percent of Wallace-Rose Hill students qualified for the *High Schools That Work* Award of Educational Achievement[1] in 1996, compared to 17 percent at all *HSTW* sites and 37 percent at high-scoring sites similar to Wallace-Rose Hill. Award recipients at Wallace-Rose Hill scored substantially higher than academic students in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) national sample. (See Table 8.)

Table 8

Comparison of the Average Scores of Students Who Qualified for the *HSTW* Award of Educational Achievement at Wallace-Rose Hill High School and the Performance of Academic Students in the NAEP National Sample

Performance Area	Average Scores of Award Recipients at Wallace-Rose Hill High School	Average Scores of Academic Students in the NAEP National Sample
Reading	310	302
Mathematics	329	317
Science	313	307

Note: Scores are based on a scale of 0 to 500.

- **Students Succeed in a High-Performance Environment**

Despite enrolling more students in tougher courses, Wallace-Rose Hill High School made a number of gains between 1994 and 1996: Fewer students were retained (35 in 1996 compared to 91 in 1994), the number of dropouts declined (from 36 to 12), and fewer students were suspended. Discipline problems have almost vanished: No weapons or drugs were found at school in 1997-98. Students feel safe, work hard in their studies, and thrive in a "caring" environment.

In the 1996 *HSTW* Teacher Survey, 70 percent of Wallace-Rose Hill teachers said they expect career/technical students to meet the same standards as college-preparatory students. Only 30 percent of teachers at all *HSTW* sites gave that answer.

Student performance at Wallace-Rose Hill is affected by what teachers say and do to encourage students to work hard and to take challenging courses. More students in 1996 than in 1994 reported being encouraged to take more mathematics and science courses, and they did so. Students also reported doing more homework, reading more books, and making more oral presentations in class in 1996 than in 1994. (See Table 9.)

[1] The *High Schools That Work* Award of Educational Achievement is presented to students who major in a vocational or technical area, complete two of the three academic components of the *HSTW*-recommended curriculum, and meet all three of the *HSTW* performance goals (reading, mathematics and science) on the *HSTW* Assessment.

Table 9

Increases in Expectations for Wallace-Rose Hill High School Students
Between 1994 and 1996

Students reported:	% in 1994	% in 1996
They were encouraged to take more mathematics and science courses.	70	88
They took four or more mathematics courses.	54	81
They took four or more science courses.	32	56
Their teachers expected them to do well.	84	97
They did one or more hours of homework daily.	58	74
They read more than two assigned books outside of class.	78	98
They made more than two oral presentations in class.	61	93

■ **Students Benefit from Strong Academic and Career Guidance**

Sixty-three percent of students at Wallace-Rose Hill High School reported in 1996 that they received the most help in planning a high school program of study before the ninth grade. The percentage increased considerably between 1994 and 1996 and greatly exceeded the percentage (26 percent) at all *HSTW* sites in 1996. The percentage of students who reported satisfaction with the help they received in selecting courses increased from 68 percent in 1994 to 84 percent in 1996.

Higher expectations have made an impression on students. Ninety-one percent of students in 1996 said they planned to continue their studies after graduation, compared to 70 percent in 1994. This compares to 63 percent at all *HSTW* sites in 1996. One year after completing high school, 79 percent of Wallace-Rose Hill's 1996 graduates had enrolled in some kind of postsecondary education, compared to 60 percent at all *HSTW* sites.[2]

[2] One year after completing high school, all students who participated in the 1996 *HSTW* Assessment were asked to participate in a survey of their experiences since graduation. There was a 100 percent response rate for the 58 graduates of Wallace-Rose Hill High School.

Principals Make a Difference in School Improvement

Charles Blanchard, principal at Wallace-Rose Hill High School in Teachey, N.C., says, "School improvement doesn't just happen. People have to make it happen." Principals play crucial roles in making things happen. These roles include:

■ **The Principal as a Visionary.** Blanchard is a true believer in school improvement. His experience, understanding and willingness to learn are characteristics that help him identify school and classroom practices that make sense. He then works with district leaders and his staff to implement the good ideas. As a result, Wallace-Rose Hill High School is often ahead of the state in setting higher standards for students. Two examples are 1) raising graduation requirements and 2) requiring incoming ninth-graders to get extra help in the summer if they are not prepared to do high school-level work.

■ **The Principal as a Role Model.** Blanchard models good practices in school improvement. When the school implemented a new teacher-adviser program, he volunteered to work with a group of students. That showed teachers what they were supposed to do in guiding and advising students and lent credibility to the process.

■ **The Involved Principal.** Blanchard works hard to create a "family atmosphere" at the school, sees himself as a member of that family, and rolls up his sleeves to work alongside his teachers in making important changes. "Mr. Blanchard doesn't ask us to do anything he is not willing to do himself," one staff member said. When the school decided to adopt Reading-to-Learn as a way to improve students' reading performance, Blanchard attended a training session and facilitated a workshop for his teachers. The investment has paid off: Between 1994 and 1996, the average reading score of Wallace-Rose Hill students climbed from below the *HSTW* goal to far above the goal and one of the highest scores in the *HSTW* network.

■ **The Principal as an Instructional Leader.** Blanchard asks all teachers to keep portfolios of their classes and turn them in to him every six weeks. The portfolio contains a list of personal objectives, a time line of work for the class, samples of integrated assignments, information on grading policies, and a summary of student performance. Blanchard holds an hour-long conference with each teacher at the beginning of the year to discuss the portfolios and ways to address unmet needs. Teachers see this process as very positive. Knowing that teachers need time to plan, Blanchard provides a schedule for the next school year at the end of the current year. This lets teachers know what they will be teaching and gives them the summer to get ready.

■ **The Principal as a Manager of School Improvement.** Blanchard has worked with his staff to develop a vision of how to improve the school and raise student achievement. He uses data to lead discussions of the school's challenges, and encourages the staff to be guided by good information. He expects a lot of the staff but gives them the flexibility to try new ideas. At the end of the school year, each teacher submits a suggestion for possible action in the coming year. Blanchard shares a summary of the suggestions with the school improvement team.

Lessons Learned

"The framework of *HSTW* key practices has helped us accelerate student achievement and meet the state's accountability standards," Blanchard said. Lessons learned while implementing *HSTW* include:

- School improvement is an ongoing process.
- High expectations are the key in improving student achievement.
- A common goal brings the staff together to "talk the same language."
- Data collection and analysis are essential in assessing progress and moving forward.
- Applied learning techniques help students see the usefulness of both academic and technical courses. How students learn is as important as what they learn.
- Teachers need staff development on ways to incorporate real-life applications into their classes.
- Students must be active participants in the learning process.
- All students need a four-year program of study to guide them toward their goals.
- Faculty and parents must work together to help students plan for the future.
- Staff development must focus on achieving results.

Plans for the Future

While Wallace-Rose Hill High School has made great strides in improving performance, school leaders and teachers want more for their students. Future plans include:

- Improving science achievement;
- Getting more support from business and industry for curriculum and instruction;
- Developing more work-based learning opportunities for teachers and students;
- Continuing to integrate academic and vocational studies;
- Identifying staff development funds to help teachers raise standards in their classes and use new instructional methods;
- Working with community colleges to give students early access to high-quality vocational instruction.

Strong Support for School Improvement from the District, the State and the SREB

District leaders share the school's vision for improving student performance and have shown their support by:

- Establishing policies (such as higher graduation requirements) that send a message to students, parents and business leaders that the purpose of high school is to prepare students for further learning;

- Giving school leaders and teachers the flexibility to get top performance from students.

State policies and practices that have contributed to higher achievement include:

- Adopting a new state graduation policy that requires all students to complete three mathematics courses (including Algebra I) and three science courses. This policy reinforces earlier action taken by the school.

- Requiring all schools to participate in state end-of-course exams in six areas. The exams represent one-fourth of a student's grade for the semester. School leaders say the exams support their efforts to raise school and classroom expectations.

- Adopting a new state policy that requires students to score at a certain proficiency level on state end-of-course exams. Eighth-graders who fail to reach this level are not permitted to enter grade 9 unless they attend a special extra-help catch-up program in the summer.

The Southern Regional Education Board has contributed to the school's continuous progress by:

- Providing a focus and a framework for improvement efforts.

- Helping the school identify outstanding school and classroom practices. Wallace-Rose Hill teachers have contacted and visited other schools in the *HSTW* network to get new ideas.

- Providing data to help the school measure its progress, identify its challenges, and plan for the future. "The *HSTW* Assessment is our most useful source of data," Blanchard said. "The surveys are excellent and are not available from any other source."

- Conducting technical assistance visits to uncover remaining challenges and to recommend actions for further improvement. "The state accountability process tell us that we may have a problem, but it doesn't focus on ways to solve the problem," Blanchard said. "*HSTW* technical assistance visits describe the challenges and give realistic steps for addressing them."

- Providing staff-development conferences and workshops. The majority of Wallace-Rose Hill teachers have participated in *HSTW* staff development to learn how to improve the school.

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